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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a Canadian program aimed specifically at 7-10 year old children who are not yet heavily or directly involved in the use of solvents or alcohol, who represent a high-risk group. It taps a valuable community resource (high school students) and operates on a minimal budget. The intention is to provide a stable, ongoing relationship between the child and a high school student, and through this relationship to provide alternatives to potential alcohol and drug abuse. (PFS)

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ALCOHOLISM FOUNDATION OF MANITOBA

STUDENT MATCH PROGRAM

Program Review 1976/77

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As Presented at:

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem - Solvent Abuse:

More and more children, particularly in the core area of Winnipeg, are using solvents. The increase in solvent use over the last few years has been dramatic. Social agencies in the area have identified families who are hard core solvent abusers. But a more widespread use of solvents is indicated by teachers and police. Police, school officials and parents are frustrated by their inability to deal with this increasing use.

Children who use solvents may be as young as six or seven and generally continue their use through to adolescence. Generally as alcohol becomes as accessible, solvent use decreases. Children from families identified as hard core solvent abusers continue their use of solvents into adulthood. One common correlation between children who use solvents is the corresponding lack of a consistent, stable adult relationship within the home or community. Also many children using solvents are from families of high alcohol abuse.

Our Response

Student Match is an alcohol and drug prevention program for 7-10 year old children with a high potential for becoming sniffers and/or alcohol abusers. This high risk group has been identified by resource personnel from four inner city elementary schools.

Children are matched with a 15-19 year old high school student who agreed to act as a companion to the younger child throughout the school year on a weekly basis.

The intention of the program is to provide a stable, ongoing relationship for the child and through this relationship, alternatives will be provided for potential alcohol and drug abuse behavior.

Student Match is a unique program in that it is:

1. *A prevention program aimed specifically at children who are not yet heavily or directly involved in sniff or alcohol, but who represent a high risk group.*

2. *It taps a valuable community resource - high school students.*

3. *It operates on a minimal budget.*

Our Objectives

- *For the Young Child:*

  1. *A caring relationship with an older person.*

  2. *An opportunity to share life experiences.*

  3. *Affect the potential solvent users' attitudes and behavior.*

  4. *Alternative activities for children with limited outside community experiences.*

- *For the Young Adult, An Opportunity To:*

  1. *Develop relationships with a young child.*

  2. *See themselves as useful members of their community.*

  3. *Share their experiences.*

  4. *Develop a sense of community with emphasis on responsibility to others.*

Program Implementation

Initial meetings were held with:

1. *Inner city resource teachers in order to ensure that the objectives of the program met the students' needs.*

2. *High school guidance teachers in order to promote the program in the high schools.*

3. *Winnipeg School Division No. 1 superintendent who later secured school board approval for the program.*

For The Younger Students

Resource teachers identified 10 students from their school who were selected on the basis of:

1. *Peripheral involvement with sniff either because of older brothers and sisters involvement or peer group association.*

2. *Family instability usually through a high degree of alcohol abuse.*

3. *Low self-esteem especially as reflected in few or no ties to an adult or peer.*

Resource teachers completed a student profile form (see attached A) and spoke with each students' parent(s) to obtain parental permission. When completed the forms were forwarded to AFM. Matching of students was done by the high school students on the basis of information contained in the profile.

Initial individual meetings between the high school and younger student were handled by the resource teacher. The resource teacher also was responsible for introducing the high school student to the parent(s) of the younger student.

Throughout the program, the resource teachers from each school were invaluable monitors of the program. They attended high school training days, met informally with the younger students and dealt with specific student or family problems occurring for the high school students. Some of the resource teachers felt the program had also helped them to develop relationships with their students (using the Student Match program as a vehicle).

For Our High School Students

The four Guidance Teachers introduced the program in their respective high schools. The list of volunteers were compiled and two meetings were held at each high school. A screening process was not used. The two informational meetings stressed the intent of the program and the commitment involved. Students were given parental permission forms (see attached B) and were asked to make a final decision to participate.

At the third meeting, students were asked to complete an informational sheet for our records and return signed permission forms (see attached C). High school groups were asked to select a student by comparing the profile sheet with their own interests and abilities. Introductions were then arranged with the appropriate resource teacher.

Throughout the year, high school students participated in four training days. (See attached agendas). Topics included child development, native culture, alcohol and drug information, self-awareness and communication skills, etc. Training days were attended by the resource and high school staff on a voluntary basis. Through the training days, difficult situations and problems were discussed and dealt with by the high school students and resource people.

Group meetings were held at each high school and individual interviews were conducted every other month with each student. Resource teachers also completed a weekly form (see attached D) indicating follow-up on student commitment, activities and any problems. Close liaison was maintained through the resource teachers.

Student Co-ordinators were selected by each high school group and met with us every other month for discussions, e.g. planning training days, problems, joint school activities. Student Co-ordinators proved invaluable to the program and through them, student experiences and concerns were relayed.

Program Impact

In April, an assessment of the program was conducted. Inner city classroom teachers with participating students, resource teachers, guidance counsellors and students all were asked for a written evaluation of the program (see attached forms).

Program Impact (continued)

Response from school personnel was extremely positive. The younger students were consistently noted to be more open and responsive than previous to their involvement. Many teachers commented on the effect of a positive youth model and the alternative activities.

High school student responses were very positive. Students felt the involvement with a younger student allowed them an opportunity to reflect on their own lifestyles and values. Overall they felt a sense of positive and meaningful involvement with their community. Most of the students have made a commitment to continue the relationship over the summer.

High school guidance teachers stated they wanted more direct input and involvement in the program. The program has spread by word of mouth among high school students and all guidance people felt continuation of the program would allow for many new students to become involved. Perhaps most gratifying of all were reports of high school students whose sense of responsibility was thought low by high school staff and for whom the program provided an opportunity to be responsible and caring young adults. While at times we questioned our non-screening process for volunteers, these students verified to use that a screening process based on school performance or attitudes would have been program defeating.

The program began with 40 high school students and 40 7-10 year old students. 80% of our matches remained in tact for the school year. Some high school students were unable to maintain the commitment because of other time demands; some of our younger students left the city or were apprehended by Family Services during the year. High school students proved tenacious in keeping contact with their younger students though for some it could only be by mail because of the change of living circumstances.

Overall assessment of the program provided some good suggestions for improvement and an encouraging mandate to continue.

New Directions

In light of the program assessment Student Match will be continued next year with some expansion. Next year we hope to work with 60-70 student pairs.

New Directions (continued)

One of our participating high schools would like to see Student Match incorporated as a credit course with a percentage of classroom time in which to explore concepts covered during our training days.

Closer liaison with high schools will be incorporated into next year's design. It has also been suggested that specific high schools be matched with specific elementary schools in order to facilitate closer contact with the resource teacher and classroom teachers.

Training days will be sequenced differently in light of high school students evaluations and some changes in resource people will be necessary.

Student Match has provided those of us at the Alcoholism Foundation of Manitoba who worked on the program with an opportunity to meet and grow with some very special people.

This booklet would not be complete without our special thanks to:

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